

Courthouse Conclusions:

A Study of County Courthouses and Their Effect on Rural Indiana

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This paper has been written to inspect the relationship a county courthouse has on a rural Indiana county seat. I had two main selection criteria: first, the county must have a population of under 15,000 people, and secondly, the courthouse must have been constructed before 1920. Of the 92 county courthouses in Indiana, 28 fit my selection criteria and were studied. The topics I felt important to write about in this paper include the selection of a county seat, the location and architecture of a courthouse, the architects chosen to design the courthouse, the physical condition of the courthouse, and the items displayed in and around the courthouse. It is my contention that all of these items show what role a courthouse played and is playing in the ever-changing county seat community.

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Chairs inside the courtroom of the Washington County Courthouse.

Introduction

The county seat of Lake County, where I grew up, is in a city called Crown Point. Crown Point is not exactly a thriving metropolis; its population is just under 20,000, and the town straddles the edge of mall-crazed suburbia and quiet pastoral farmland. Yet this is why I like Crown Point. Sitting smack in the middle of Lake County, it is a blend of what the county is made up of.

There are two county courthouses in Lake County. When approaching from my hometown of Griffith, driving south on highway 55, you see the modern Lake County Judicial Complex first. It is a large brown building housing courtrooms, the county jail, and the like. There are metal detectors everywhere inside, cylindrical trash cans and, when a view of the outside is available, it is seen through tall narrow windows like the ones on castles behind which archers would shoot at the enemy. The Judicial Complex is a functional building. It is a building with a job, and performs that job well.

Further south on highway 55, you begin to approach the outskirts of Crown Point. If you look at street signs, you notice the small white picture of a courthouse on them all. And you drive deeper into town until suddenly you pass the three-story building that has been blocking your view of the real town jewel: the old Lake County Courthouse.

The Lake County Courthouse has been termed academically perfect in the world of architecture. My feelings towards the courthouse have been of a less scholarly nature; I just always thought it was a neat looking old building. It has personality. The surrounding courthouse square also has personality -- a movie theater -- a *real* movie theater, not some sort of Cineplex, is located on the square. The old county jail, the same jail from which John Dillinger escaped using a gun carved out of soap, is right down the street. Rudolph Valentino got his marriage license from the Lake County Courthouse. It is a building filled with history, with local legends. It is the hub of the community. It is decorated for Christmas in the winter; it is the scene of a country market during the summer. Even with the new Judicial Complex a few miles away, the old courthouse still is the location for trials in the second floor courtroom. The basement of the courthouse, interestingly enough, has been converted to a score or so of shops. Bridal gowns, stained glass, and candy are some of the various wares you can buy in the courthouse.

That is the Lake County Courthouse, the courthouse from my childhood. I have always loved the old building because it was so different from anything we had in Griffith. It was more stately and graceful than the stark Judicial Complex down the road. I would come to Crown Point and feel jealous because my street signs in Griffith were devoid of little white pictures of courthouses. After becoming a student at Ball State, the Lake County Courthouse marked the return to home; I could see the three towers of the building rise above the treeline from I-65.

Because of my infatuation with the Lake County Courthouse, I began to notice more and more the courthouses I would encounter on my travels through Indiana. I would pass the county courthouses in Tipton and Frankfort while on Highway 28 while traveling to and from college, and they, like the Lake County Courthouse, became mile markers on my journey. I was always impressed that a small town like Tipton could have such a tall, beautiful building.

This interest in courthouses coincided with my burgeoning interest in photography. I wanted to take pictures of buildings that had not been previously focused on. While there is some literature on Indiana's county courthouses, most of it deals with the architectural details of the buildings rather than their personality. Personality of courthouses was what I was looking for. A vague idea for my Honors Thesis began to form in my mind. I knew I wanted to write and take pictures of courthouses. I knew I wanted to learn the history of the buildings. I just did not know where this research would take me.

Eventually, I decided to concentrate on the importance of a county courthouse to a rural community. To select which courthouses I would look at, I defined a county as rural if it had fewer than 15,000 residents. I also excluded any courthouse that was built later than 1920. I did this because I feel newer courthouses, like the one in Muncie or the Judicial Complex in Lake County, lend themselves more towards being a place of governmental business only and less towards being a focus of community events and displays.

I was left with 28 courthouses, located mainly in the northwestern and southeastern corners of the state. Of these 28 I managed to visit all but one: the Perry County Courthouse at Cannelton. In addition to visiting the courthouses and local libraries, I took pictures, photocopied materials, and took notes. As my research began to come together, I discovered what I really wanted to write about was the relation county courthouses have to a small, rural community. I saw that the courthouse brought business to an otherwise small town, was the

center of community events, was the showplace of a county. The courthouse was meant to instill pride in the citizens of its county and envy in the citizens of others. The courthouse was often what separated a thriving from a dying town.



Silhouette of the Union County Courthouse.

County Seat

Before a courthouse is ever built, a city must first be named the county seat. This is a matter of no small importance. For some locations, becoming the county seat was a matter of life or death. It was not at all unusual for a site, after having been denied a bid to become county seat, to wither and die. County seat battles do not get much publicity today. The county lines and towns are for the most part established in Indiana. However, in the 1800s, the lines on a map were much more fluid. Just because a city was named county seat did not necessarily mean it always had to remain the county seat.

County seats in rural Indiana were normally chosen by one of two ways. The first was location. The county seat of Parke County was chosen, for example, by a group of commissioners. For reasons unexplained, counties on the Wabash River alternated between having their county seats either on the river or inland. Parke County, being between Fountain and Vigo Counties, both with riverside county seats, had to locate its county seat inland. The three commissioners sent to select the site picked an area close to the center of the county.¹

Courthouse historian Paul Goeldner states that “counties were usually limited in size to permit the most distant farm dweller to ride to the county seat, transact his business, and return home in a single day.”² This theory works in many cases, but some county seats are in locations that are inconvenient for almost every county resident to travel to. This brings us to the second way of choosing a county seat: donation of land by a private citizen.

Newton County is in the northwestern part of the state, directly south of Lake County. It is about thirteen miles wide and thirty miles long. The Iroquois River divides the bottom quarter of the county from the rest. In the 1860s, when Newton County was being organized, approximately ninety percent of the population lived north of the Iroquois. However, the county seat was located in the town of Kent (which later became Kentland), a town that lies only two miles north of the southernmost point of the county. This came about because of A. J. Kent, a resident who donated five hundred dollars, 160 acres of land, and a courthouse square to the commissioners who were selecting the county seat. A courthouse was promptly built on the property. The matter, for all purposes, seemed settled, even though the location of the county

¹ Julie Snowden, *Parke County Indiana's Seat of Justice: The Story of the Courthouse* (Rockville, Indiana: Parke County Covered Bridge Museum & Gift Shop, 1968), 1.

² Paul Kenneth Goeldner, “Temples of Justice: Nineteenth Century County Courthouses in the Midwest and Texas (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1971), 7.

seat was inconvenient to everyone except the railroad. Kent happened to lie on the only rail line in Newton County at the time.

Because of the odd placement of the county seat, the other towns in the county began a battle to remove the county seat from Kent. A total of nine legal attempts was made by four different communities over a period of 43 years. One location, Beaver City, even constructed a replica of the original Kent courthouse in their own town square, anticipating the county seat change.³ These towns never succeeded in their attempts, but they do serve as an example of the extremes towns have gone when trying to become the county seat.

The story of Newton County is not really that unusual when considering the histories of other Indiana counties. Martin County, for instance, had a record of nine different county seats within fifty years. North Vernon in Jennings County, and Tell City in Perry County have continued their bids in recent times to move the county seats to their cities instead of the keeping them in the much smaller towns of Vernon and Cannelton, respectively. Perhaps because these cities have bigger populations and more commerce than their rivals, they covet the county seat position. This indicates the prestige a county seat bestows on a town, especially in a rural area. It is a distinction no other town in the county can claim. It sets a town apart. In his article "County Thoughts," Calvin Trillin states, "In rural counties, the courthouse is an important industry. It provides not just county jobs but also lawsuits for lawyers and stationery orders for the office supply store and repair work for the garage. It might mean a county hospital, and it is likely to mean a county newspaper."⁴ In short, a humble little town that also happens to be a county seat is where the action is. That is why Beaver City wanted the county seat, and why North Vernon and Tell City still want it. They may have more people and more money, but they are representative of most small towns in the Midwest. There are considerably fewer county seats in Indiana than there are moderately prosperous towns.

³ John Ade, *Newton County 1853-1911* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company Publishers, 1911), 129-131, 141-162.

⁴ Calvin Trillin, "County Thoughts," in *Court House: A Photographic Document*, ed. Richard Pare (New York: Horizon Press, 1978), 37.



The view from the steps of the Union County Courthouse.

Courthouse Square

In surveying rural Indiana county courthouses, the next thing I considered was where the courthouse is situated. The location of the courthouse is almost as important as how the courthouse looks. In many cases, the location dictates the style of the courthouse.

In the courthouses that I am focusing on, there are two patterns of placement I have noticed. The first is the courthouse square, which is most familiar to people. When someone says "courthouse," the picture of a wide, grassy courthouse square comes to mind, with the courthouse itself rising with dignity out of the center.

There are really four common types of courthouse squares in the United States. The Block square is a square one block wide, with two streets coming together at the corners. A Philadelphia square is also one block wide, but has four streets meeting the square in the middle of a block. A Harrisonburg square is one block wide, with two streets meeting the square in the



A corner of the courthouse square as seen from the Pulaski County Courthouse clock tower. The courthouse sits on a Block square.

center of the block, and one street coming in at each of the corners. The last type of square is called the Four Block square, with the square being two blocks wide and having two streets coming in at each corner, and four streets meeting in the center of the blocks along the square. It looks like the Block and Philadelphia squares superimposed on one another.¹

Most county seats in this study have one of the above squares. The advantage to this style is that it shows off the courthouse to good advantage. Normally the business district surrounds the square, and the wide area of lawn sets the courthouse apart from the other buildings as something distinct. Courthouses that are located on squares normally boast a clock tower of some sort, and this central location also made it easier for the townspeople to check the time in the days before portable timepieces were common.

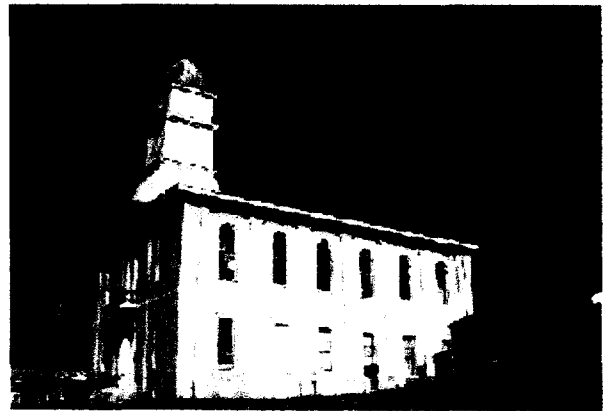
In contrast to the courthouse square set up is the other common location of a courthouse, which I like to call "anywhere else in the town besides a courthouse square." This may sound

¹ M. W. Apple, "The Courthouse Square," in *History of the Orange County Courthouse*, ed. Arthur L. Dillard (Paoli, Indiana: Stout's Print Shop, 1973), 42.

vague, but it is apt. The courthouses that lie off a central square tend to resemble each other. They tend to be smaller buildings, usually without a tower, normally in predominately rural counties. These courthouses are much less imposing than those situated on a central square.

The Ohio County Courthouse is an example of this. The county seat is in Rising Sun, a town of a little over 2,300 people. It lies on the Ohio River, and its main industry is riverboat gambling. The courthouse was built in 1845, and is the oldest courthouse in Indiana that has remained in continuous use. While technically the courthouse is on a square, it is located somewhat sleepily three blocks away from the business district. This might not make sense until you find out that the courthouse is built on the highest ground in the city. The Ohio River is prone to flooding. I remember driving through Rising Sun two years ago and seeing part of the town submerged and a section of Highway 56 (which follows the Ohio for a portion of southeastern Indiana) closed due to floodwater. The courthouse was located away from the heart of Rising Sun in order to protect it.

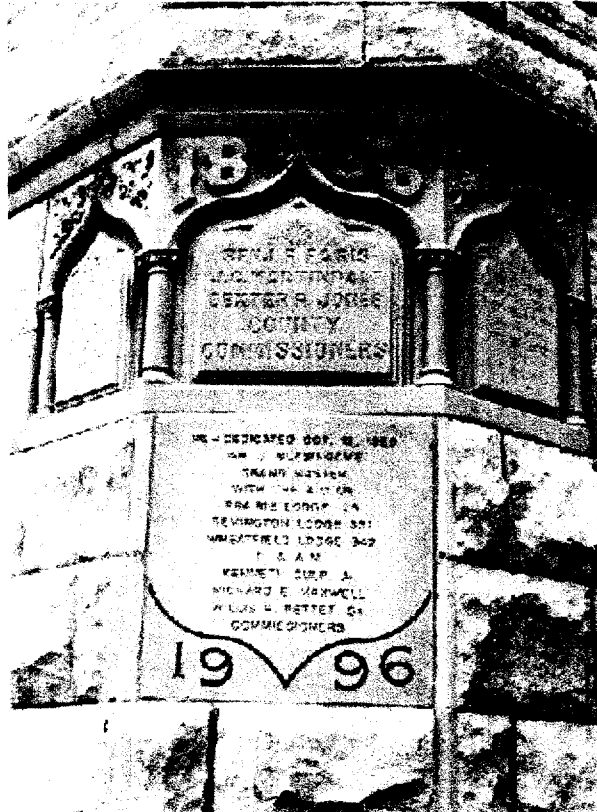
Somewhat more inexplicable is the Martin County Courthouse. The building is one of the most unpretentious courthouses in Indiana. It cost less than \$9,000 to build (in 1877, when only a few years later Parke County would build a new courthouse for more than \$100,000). The Martin County Courthouse sits on the side of the road in Shoals, the county seat, away from the center of the town or any signs of business.



Martin County Courthouse.

There are fewer courthouses that are situated apart from the center of their county seats than the ones located on a courthouse square, yet the different sites tell a lot about a town. The courthouse square is big and flashy, a source of pride for the county seat residents. The city of Rising Sun placed their courthouse away from the center of the town in order to protect it. And the courthouse in Shoals is set apart from the rest of the town, almost like an afterthought (Remember, this is the same county that changed their county seat nine times in fifty years. Perhaps Shoals did not expect the county seat to permanently remain in their town). These

— differences in locations become very important in the next consideration about county courthouses: how much is a county seat willing to spend to get the courthouse they want?

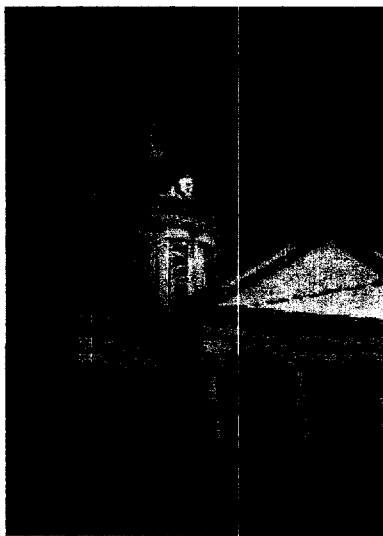


Cornerstone of the Jasper County Courthouse.

Architects

After a county decided a new courthouse was needed, the matters of expense and design became the most pressing concerns. An architect would be needed.

But not all courthouses were designed by architects. For three of the counties in this study, Brown, Ohio, and Orange, no architect is identified for their courthouses. All three buildings are relatively simple and small. The courthouses in Ohio and Orange Counties were constructed in the late 1840s. The Brown County Courthouse was built in the late 1870s for under \$10,000 at a time when other counties were constructing courthouses for more than ten times that amount. This simplicity in style and cost leads to the conjecture that such courthouses may have been designed by a local resident of the counties or that the plans for the buildings were based on pattern books. This latter possibility is most likely in the case of Ohio and Orange Counties. Pattern books were extremely popular during the antebellum era, with the most popular style being Greek Revival, which both Ohio and Orange County Courthouses happen to be.¹



Jefferson County Courthouse.

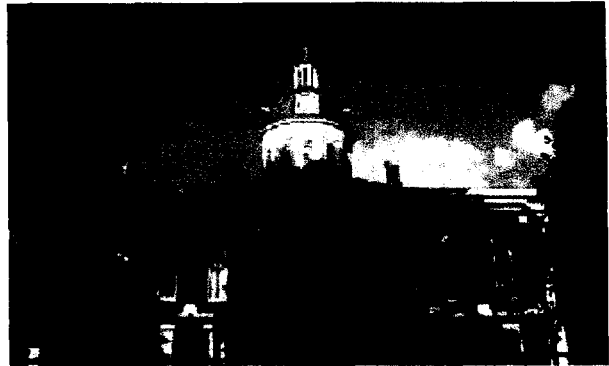
Of the remaining 25 counties, one needs to be distinguished from the others. The Switzerland County Courthouse is an example of what could be termed architectural plagiarism. The architect for the building is considered to be David Dubach, although he never submitted his plans to the Switzerland County board of commissioners.

In 1853, David Dubach, a resident of Madison, the county seat of Jefferson County, submitted his plans for the new courthouse of that county. Construction began on that building in 1854, with Dubach as one of the three contractors. A superintendent named Matthew Temperly was appointed by the board of commissioners. Temperly ordered Dubach to produce detailed working drawings of the building. The drawings were provided, and the courthouse was completed in 1855. However, in

¹ Paul Kenneth Goeldner, "Temples of Justice: Nineteenth Century County Courthouses in the Midwest and Texas" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1970), 127.

1859 a fire occurred that damaged the courthouse, and Temperly was put in charge of repairing the building according to the original plans.²

The county seat of Switzerland County, Vevay, lies only 21 miles away down the Ohio River from Madison. Despite this short distance, the Switzerland County board of commissioners in 1862 voted to adopt plans for a new courthouse that were identical to the one in Madison. The plans were submitted by



Temperly and Woodfield of Madison. The Switzerland County Courthouse. plans and specifications they submitted concluded with the sentence "And all things not herein Specified are to be like the Court House in the City of Madison, Jefferson County, Indiana."³ The pair also tried to secure the contracting bids, but lost out to John Haly. Haly made some minor changes in the columns to produce the only difference between the two buildings. Although Temperly and Woodfield submitted the plans, the acknowledged architect of the Switzerland County courthouse is David Dubach.⁴

The remaining 24 counties all have identifiable architects. The normal procedure for finding an architect was the following: after the county decided to construct a new courthouse, county commissioners would advertise for plans for the new building. The commissioners would list stipulations for the buildings -- for example, whether they wanted interior toilets, steam heating, or any other special additions or subtractions.

After the deadline for submitting plans had passed, the commissioners would then hold a competiton of sorts. This is described nicely in Julie Snowden's article, "The Parke County Courthouse":

Early in January of 1879 the commissioners advertised for plans for a courthouse, jail, and sheriff's residence to be submitted by 10 a.m. of January 29. Procedure for presentation of such plans was given as follows: each architect's plans would

² Ibid., 244.

³ Ibid., 244-245.

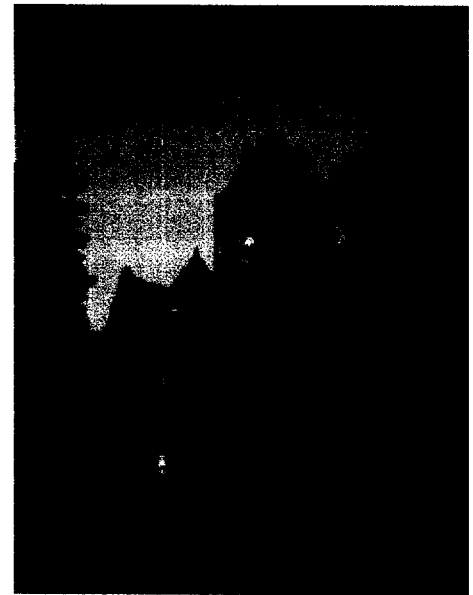
⁴ Ibid., 245.

be considered in alphabetical order and in privacy from rival firms. Each would be allowed one hour to present his plans; if any offered plans for a jail or courthouse only, the time would be lessened. By the appointed day fifteen firms had responded so presentations had to be continued for three or four days. Several were easily dismissed but others were re-examined before final acceptance of the plans of T. J. Tolan & Son of Fort Wayne, on March 20.⁵

Since so many courthouses were being constructed during the nineteenth century, courthouse design became big business. Of the fifteen bids the Parke County Courthouse received, four were by architects who designed other courthouses in this study.

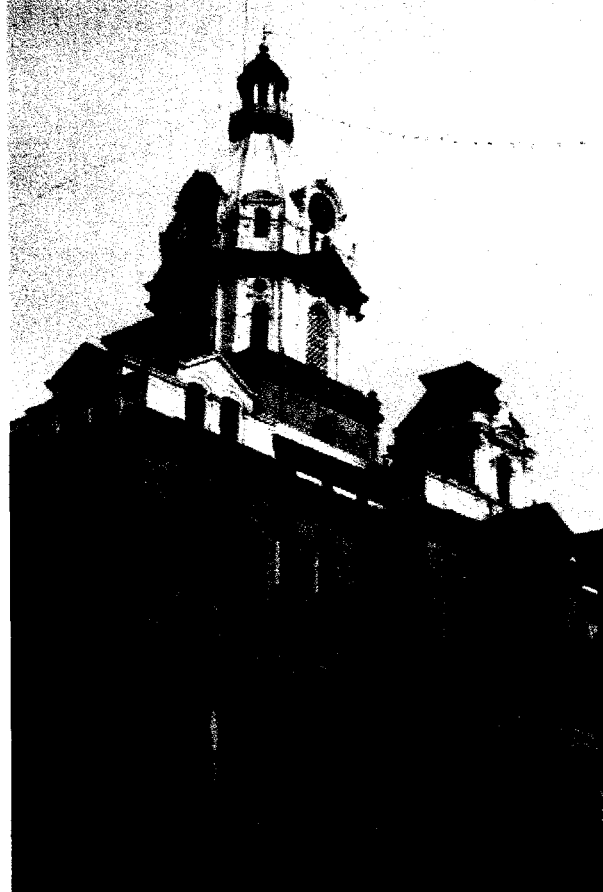
There were some local architects in the state who designed courthouses, such as Indiana's William P. George, who designed Martin County's courthouse at Shoals. Of these architects little is known besides the name. But as the amount of money a county was willing to spend rose, so did the attraction for more prestigious architects.

The biggest names in Indiana architects were probably Tolan and Bunting. Fort Wayne based Thomas J. Tolan and his son, Brentwood S. Tolan (who designed four Indiana courthouses after his father died), were responsible for seven Indiana courthouses. Indianapolis based George W. Bunting also designed seven Indiana courthouses. In this particular study, the architecture firm that most stands out is A. W. Rush and Son, from Grand Rapids, Michigan. All three of their Indiana courthouses are featured here: ones that were built in Pulaski, Fulton, and Rush Counties. These three courthouses are all similar in certain ways that will be discussed further in this paper.



Fulton County Courthouse.

⁵ Julie Snowden, *Parke County Indiana's Seat of Justice: The Story of the Courthouse* (Rockville, Indiana: Parke County Covered Bridge Museum & Gift Shop, 1968), 8.



The Parke County Courthouse, an example of Second Empire architecture.

Architecture

Any discussion of courthouses would be incomplete without mention of the architectural styles these courthouses represent. County commissioners selected a certain type of architecture because it suited their needs: whether the building was to be strictly functional, ostentatious enough to be the envy of the neighboring county seats, or a combination of both.

The first type of architecture I will describe is also the most simple. Utilitarian architecture is self explanatory. The building is designed to function without frills. The three utilitarian courthouses in this study are in Brown, Martin, and Scott Counties. The buildings are similar in many ways: they are all two stories tall, none have a clock tower, and all three are made of brick. The most expensive courthouse of the three, Scott County's cost less than \$20,000. They were built in the mid-1870s. And all three courthouses are located in southern Indiana.



Brown County Courthouse.

These courthouses were built at a time when other Indiana counties were spending around ten times the amount of money on their courthouses. Knox County, for example, spent over \$250,000 on their courthouse during the 1870s--the same time period that the Scott County Courthouse was constructed. However, all of the counties with utilitarian courthouses were rural. Brown and Martin Counties, especially, still retain an isolated feel about them (Scottsburg, the county seat of Scott County, lies right on I-65, which has increased its population). At the time the courthouses were built travel was extremely difficult between the hills and hollows of southern Indiana. The county commissioners must have felt that saving money on their courthouse was more important than trying to impress travelers from other counties.

Greek Revival is a form of architecture that became very popular in the years before the Civil War. Its origins in the ancient Greek architecture seemed very fitting for

courthouses, since Greece was considered the birthplace of democracy.¹ Greek Revival architecture is noted for its simplicity. Columns, arches, and porticos are all commonly used.

Two of the oldest courthouses in Indiana are of the Greek Revival style. They are the courthouses in Ohio and Orange counties. They feature the typical elements of Greek Revival courthouses. Both buildings also feature exterior stairways, which help provide height to the buildings, both two stories tall.

Although Greek Revival was popular in the pre-Civil War era, it also made a comeback in the early 1900s.



Clay County Courthouse.

Many courthouses built after the turn of the century use Greek Revival elements, along with other classical themes. This was a result of the World's Fair of 1893 in Chicago. The Fair displayed many examples of what is also termed Beaux Arts architecture. The name comes from the Ecole des Beaux Arts, the oldest architectural school in Europe. Beaux Arts is synonymous with neo-classicism; they both refer to a return to the roots of classical architecture. Carroll, Clay,



Jennings County Courthouse.

Franklin, Jay, Newton, Owen, Perry and Warren Counties are examples of this neo-classical style. The buildings are normally rectangular, and often feature a dome on the roof instead of a clock tower. The exterior is often sparse and plain, but the interiors often make up for the simplicity of the exterior. Stained glass rotundas and marble columns are just some of the features that are common in these courthouses.

During the Civil War, a new style, Italianate Classicism became popular in county courthouses in the Midwest. The buildings featured round arched openings,

¹ Paul Kenneth Goeldner, "Temples of Justice: Nineteenth Century County Courthouses in the Midwest and Texas" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1971), 127.

some columns, quoins (which were elements that normally contrasted red brick against white stone), and cornices.² The two Italianate courthouses in this study are in the neighboring counties of Jennings and Ripley in southeastern Indiana; both were built in the early 1860s.

The next architectural style is Second Empire. One of its most predominant features is a mansard roof. The term “mansard” is refers to a roof that has steep sides and a flat top, as illustrated in the photograph of the Benton County Courthouse.

There are two examples of Second Empire architecture in this study. They are the Benton County and Parke County courthouses. They lie on the western side of Indiana and were built within ten years of each other (the Benton County Courthouse was built in 1874, the Parke County Courthouse from 1879 to 1881). Despite those similarities, the buildings differ greatly in appearance. The Benton County Courthouse is more modest, costing around half of what the Parke County Courthouse did. The buildings also are constructed of different materials. The Parke County Courthouse is of stone, whereas the Benton County Courthouse is brick. However, both feature mansard roofs.



Benton County Courthouse.

The courthouse in Switzerland County is considered to be what courthouse historian Paul Goeldner architecturally termed “County Capitol” style. County Capitol courthouses are ones that try for greatness like a state capitol, but on a somewhat smaller scale. Since the architects who designed county courthouses would sometimes also design state capitol buildings, there was bound to be some overlapping in the styles. The Switzerland County Courthouse in Vevay resembles the 1796 statehouse in Hartford, Connecticut, for example.³ The Switzerland County Courthouse is the only one in this study to be considered a County Capitol.

² Ibid., 151.

³ Ibid., 240.

Likewise, the only semi-Gothic courthouse in this study is the one in Decatur County at Greensburg. The Gothic style was not very popular for courthouses, mainly because architects seemed to consider the Gothic elements as being appropriate for cathedrals and churches, but not government buildings. Nevertheless, a few semi-Gothic courthouses were constructed. Edwin May designed two in Indiana, the Decatur County courthouse and the more elaborate Knox County courthouse at Vincennes. Some Gothic features on the Decatur County courthouse are the concave roof, the tall, asymmetrical clock tower, and a covered belfry.

The neoclassical revival previously mentioned was preceded by the last architectural style that is exhibited by courthouses in this study. Romanesque became one of the most popular county courthouse styles in the country. Nine courthouses in this study of 28 are Romanesque, including those located in Blackford, Fulton, Jasper, Pulaski, Rush, Starke, Tipton, Union, and Washington counties. These courthouses are found elsewhere in the state. Their construction costs ranged from moderately to extremely expensive. These courthouses were the crown jewels, the ones designed to show off to surrounding towns and counties.

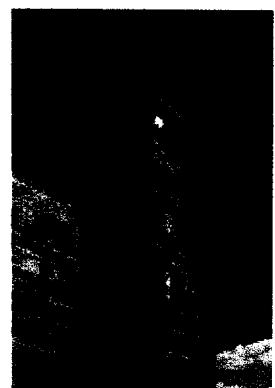
Romanesque architecture became popular in the late 1800s. The impetus for the style's popularity was Henry Hobson Richardson, an architect who is generally credited with having perfected the Romanesque style. Elements common in Romanesque buildings are rough stonework, bold details, wide and heavy doorways, large towers, and



**Tipton County
Courthouse.**



Jasper County Courthouse.

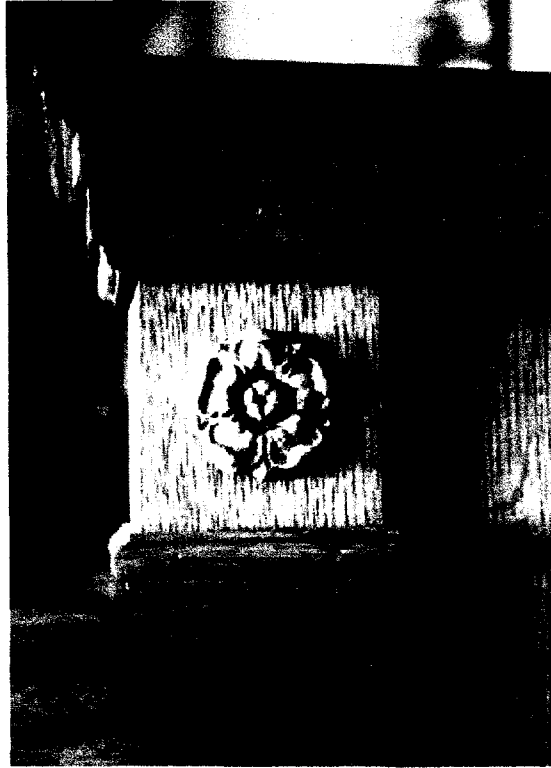


**Blackford County
Courthouse.**

use of contrasting colored materials.⁴ The predominant and ornamental features of the Romanesque style made it the perfect choice for a building as pretentious as the county courthouse. There is no mistaking a courthouse built in the Romanesque style for any other type of building.

All of the Romanesque courthouses in this study were built in the 1890s except for Washington County, which constructed their courthouse from 1886 to 1888. This was the great courthouse boom in Indiana, where counties decided to build a new courthouse because their neighboring counties were building one. This is evident with Pulaski, Fulton, and Starke counties, for instance. Pulaski County built its new courthouse in 1894 to 1895 at a cost of \$42,000. Its neighbor to the east, Fulton County, built its new courthouse the following years, 1895 to 1896, at a cost of almost \$100,000. Pulaski County's neighbor to the north, Starke County, built its courthouse in 1897-98 at a cost of over \$125,000. As is evident with this example, the competition was intense to have the biggest and the best courthouse in the area.

⁴Ibid., 305.



**Detail of carved wooden flower on a railing in the courtroom
of the Carroll County Courthouse.**

Courthouse Pride

The basis of this paper is the theory that a courthouse is the easel on which the community paints. It is in and around the courthouse and square that the community puts on display things that are important to them. Fairs, memorials, and monuments are among the things seen around and inside courthouses, especially in rural counties. The courthouse and its surrounding square is the center of a community.

However, the courthouse not only functions as an easel; it is also a trophy bestowed on the town. If a town is lucky enough to be declared the county seat, and gains all the extra perks associated with that title, then it, of course, has the natural right to show off. County seat status is most clearly shown in its county courthouse.

In conducting research for this paper, I examined many county histories that had been published over the past century. Many were written by local historians, who, while writing a factual work of history, were not above showing their county pride. Numerous documents from individual counties describe their particular courthouse as being the most beautiful in the state of Indiana. The most extravagant praise of a county courthouse that I have come across is George L. Johnson's description of the Rush County Courthouse:

Rushville . . . can proudly boast of the finest court house in the State of Indiana. Her citizens can throw wide open the gates of the city and invite inspection and comparison with any of the architectural structures of her rival sister cities without fear of the consequences. And regardless of what other counties may do in the future, she can rest assured that she will never need to blush because of the appearance of the home of her county officials.¹

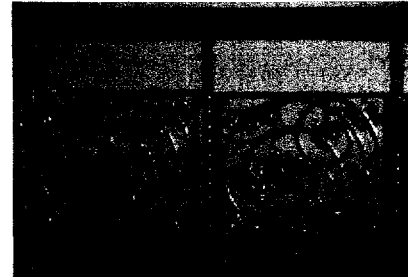
Before Johnson had glorified the Rush County Courthouse, he stated what I believe is partially the motive by historians and others to praise their particular county courthouse. True, many courthouses in Indiana *are* beautiful and deserve to be set on a pedestal, but also, according to Johnson,

There is no safer way to gauge the citizens of a town or city than by inspecting the public property of that town or city. Fine public buildings are the reflex of public-spirited men, and stamp the community in which they exist as an active

¹ George L. Johnson, ed. *Commercial History of Rushville and Rush County* (1899), 7.

and enterprising one. Go into a city where the public buildings are dwarfed or poorly constructed, and you will find a city where progression is dead and civic pride unknown.²

That's it, of course: by praising their county courthouse as being the best in the state of Indiana, people are also praising themselves. The courthouse in Rushville is spectacular; therefore, the citizens of Rushville must be spectacular as well.



Detail of stairway in the Rush County Courthouse.

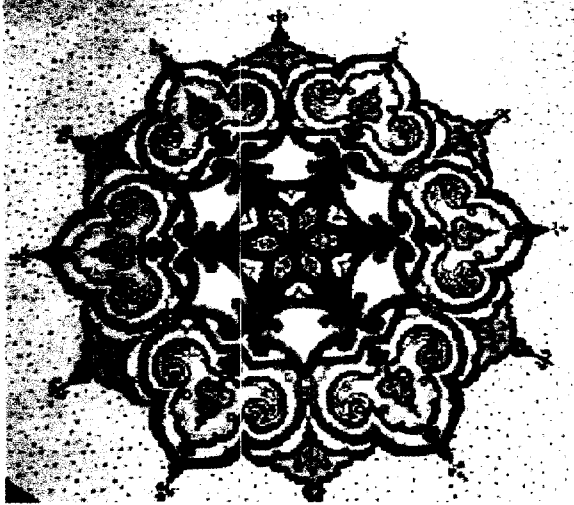
Once that step is taken, it is interesting to see how the courthouse works as a mirror to the community. For example, what particular things are highlighted in and around the courthouse, and how does this reflect the community? I do not claim to have all the answers. Some connections are easier made than others. When a county chooses to have a small, practical courthouse instead of a large, ostentatious one, it is logical to assume that the county preferred not to waste money needed elsewhere on frivolity in its public buildings. Why one county leaves its clock tower stairs open to the public and another county does not is harder to understand. However, comparisons like that are the basis of this paper.

It is easy to tell a courthouse that a county is proud of from a courthouse in an indifferent community. The first way to see the difference is to take a good look at how well the courthouse is maintained. Is the exterior of the building more appealing than the interior? Is it the other way around? Are only the very public areas inside the building restored, or are all the offices and little used areas of the building in good condition as well? Is the original feel of the building intact, or have too many things been modernized to retain that feel? In essence, how much money was a community willing to spend to retain that feeling of pride for their courthouse, and how did they spend it? These are several of the questions I considered while inspecting each courthouse.

Considering the appearance of the actual courthouse, I came to the conclusion that communities that had spent a large amount of money to build their courthouse usually tried to keep it in good condition, retaining the original tiles, paintings, stained glass, etc. whenever

² Ibid.

possible. Courthouses of the Romanesque period (for example, the Jasper County Courthouse) were especially good at this. These courthouses retained their original feel all over the building, in both the interiors and exteriors, and both the public and private areas.

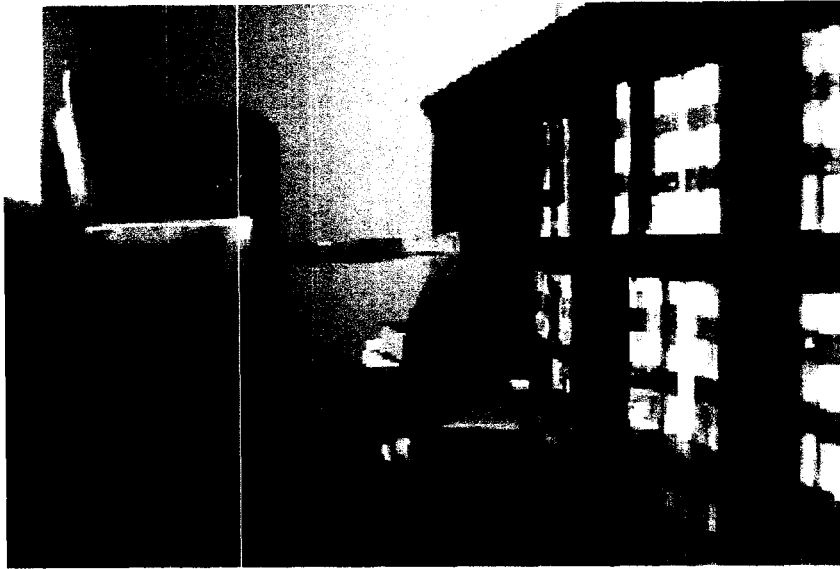


Tiled floor of rotunda in the Carroll County Courthouse.

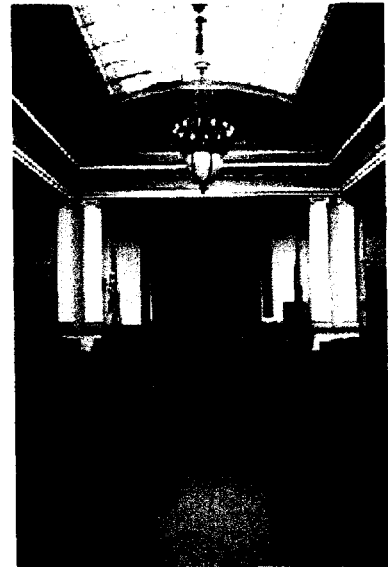
Neo-classical courthouses built after 1900 for over \$100,000 (for example, the Jay County Courthouse) also did a good job of retaining the original atmosphere of their courthouse. The neo-classical courthouses differ from the Romanesque by having much of their ornamentation on the interior of their building. Many neo-classical buildings are designed around a main rotunda as opposed to a clock tower, so much of the dramatic effect is achieved in the main public space on the interior of the building. This is typically done by using stained glass in the rotunda, an elaborate tile design on the floor, a central staircase in the middle of the building, or any combination of the three. However, offices and areas that were not commonly seen by the public tended to be modernized.

Courthouses built before 1870 were generally in good condition, although most of their historic integrity is in the exterior of the building. Interiors of some courthouses, such as the Jennings County Courthouse or the Ohio County Courthouse, generally have been remodeled and updated technologically to the detriment of the original design.

Courthouses in extremely rural counties or of the utilitarian design generally were not as well maintained as the other courthouses. This does not mean that these counties do not care about their courthouse; they may not have the funds in the budget to restore what needs restoration. It is easy to tell, though, by noticing objects in and around these courthouses, which of these counties feel pride about their courthouse and which are apathetic, which is a subject I will return to in greater detail later in this chapter.



Lawbooks inside the courtroom of the Ripley County Courthouse.



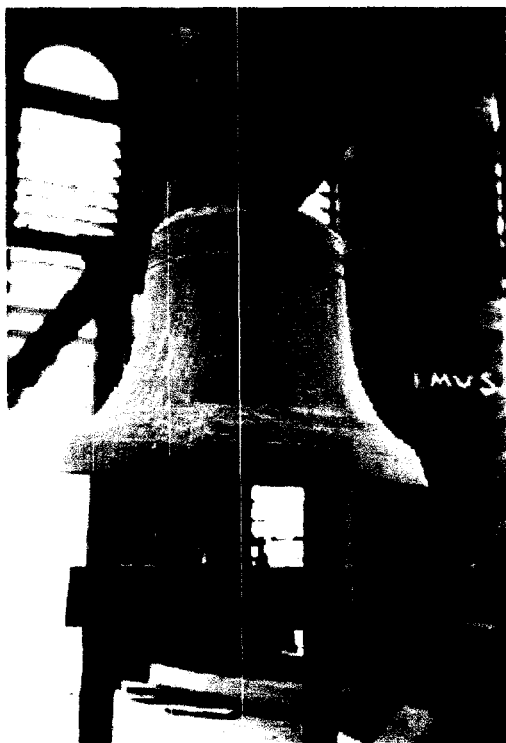
The courtroom of the Jay County Courthouse.

One outstanding feature of all the courthouses I visited was the courtrooms. Admittedly, I was only able to enter only half of the courtrooms of the courthouses in this study (court has been in session sometime). However, every single courtroom I visited was in excellent condition. Much of the original furniture, paneling, and stained glass were still in use. Often, the only noticeable additions to a courtroom were fluorescent lights, a computer, and microphones. Sometimes even those were missing. As far as the one single room in a courthouse, the courtroom is the one where the most effort is put forth to retain the original style. I believe this is because people think the courtroom is the most essential part of a courthouse. Other offices can be remodeled or even relegated to an annex, but the courtroom always remains in the original courthouse. The courtroom should be kept to its original dignity because court should be conducted with dignity. This does not mean a courtroom cannot have ornamentation in it. Most courtrooms I visited had at least some distinguishing ornamentation in it. For example, the courtroom in the Carroll County Courthouse was very plain except for the large panels of stained glass in the ceiling. Other courtrooms have elaborate wood carvings or iron metalwork in the railings, unique designs for the courtroom chairs, interesting lighting, or a grand judge's bench.

An area that is not as well taken care of as courtrooms are the clock towers of courthouses. Although most courthouses I have visited for this study do not allow public access to their clock towers, I think the courthouses that did allow the public entrance to this area



The clock gears inside the tower of the Washington County Courthouse.



The bell inside the tower of the Pulaski County Courthouse.

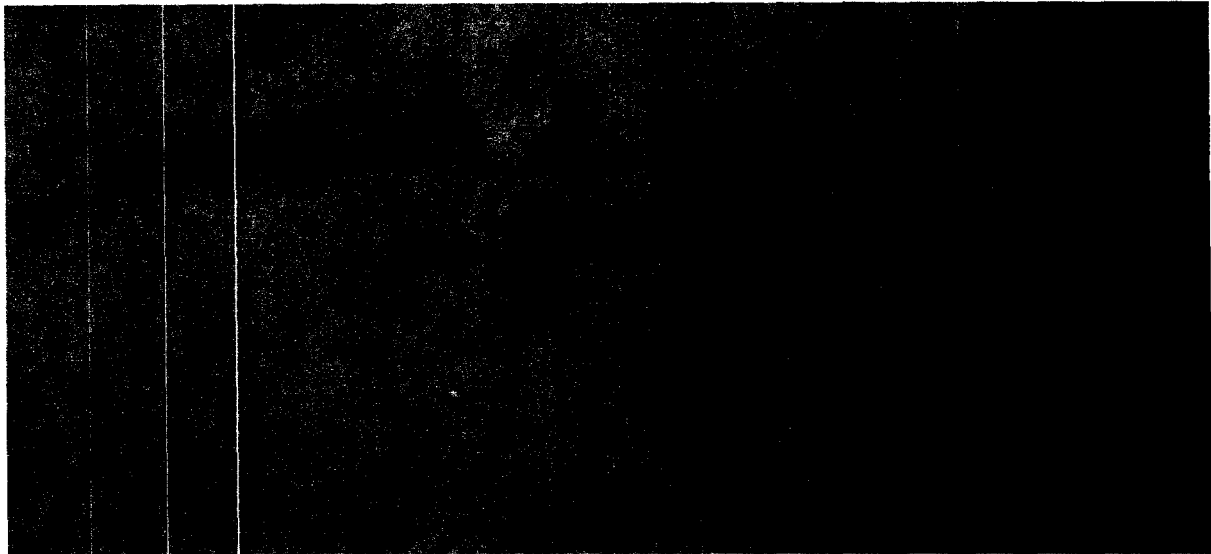
deserve mention. The two courthouses that left their towers open to the public were located in Washington and Pulaski Counties.

While exploring these towers, I discovered what a courthouse attic was used for: mainly, a place to store the thousands of huge, bulky books from days before computers. Besides the books, other oddities in the attic include old computer equipment, Christmas decorations, and, in the Pulaski courthouse, a large amount of radio equipment. A janitor encountered later explained that the courthouse was the highest point in the county, and hence was used as the main radio relaying point.

There was no attempt at pretentiousness in the two towers I was in, unlike some of the adornments that are located in the more commonly seen parts of courthouses. Both attics led to ladders of frightening dispositions. The ladder in the Washington County Courthouse looked sturdy enough, but upon reaching the top (after a harrowing three minute climb), I discovered that the only things holding the ladder to the rotting wooden floor of the next level were two rusty nails. The Pulaski County tower was no better. It contained a rickety wooden stairway to the top, which my fiancé and I traveled one at a time, afraid the combined weight of two people would cause the entire contraption to collapse. Nevertheless, both ventures were worth the fear. The Pulaski County Courthouse proudly displayed the courthouse bell and a great view of downtown Winamac. The surprise that

lay in wait for me at the top of the Washington courthouse was the gears of the courthouse clock, still operating and in meticulous good condition.

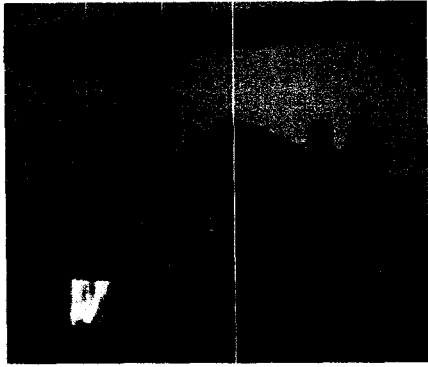
Pulaski and Washington Counties are aberrant in that they welcome the public to view the courthouse attic (which, as I mentioned previously, was in all honesty a mess) and tower. Although the tower is not something that helps county business move more efficiently, I think allowing the public to reach such a high vantage point over the city shows that the community is proud not only of the height of the courthouse, but of their town as well.



“I can’t rember this moring. so let me go pleas let me go goodbuy” - Graffiti in the jury room of the Switzerland County Courthouse.

Another interesting departure from what is normally focused on in courthouses is in the jury room of the Switzerland County Courthouse. The walls of the jury room are covered with graffiti from jurors of the late 1800s. The graffiti looks to be written in pencil on the stone walls, which have been covered by glass panels that go around the entire room. While some counties would want to hide the doodlings of bored jurors, Switzerland County has put the graffiti on display (possibly to keep future jurors from boredom!). The graffiti is fascinating to read, and I only wished I knew the stories behind some of the more obscure quotations.

I mentioned that some counties, while not having the money necessary to maintain their courthouse, also are able to exhibit pride in their building. This is done by displaying objects inside the courthouse or on the courthouse square that show off the building’s history. The Orange County Courthouse, one of the oldest in Indiana, features a display case that exhibits



The Blackford County Courthouse done in clay by elementary school children.

tools used to construct the courthouse, a box lunch and plastic silverware from the centennial celebration of the courthouse, and magazines that feature the courthouse in articles or on the cover. The Brown County Courthouse, built cheaply and of the utilitarian style, has in one of its hallways a large oil painting of the courthouse. The Blackford County Courthouse has, in its lobby, a model of the courthouse built out of clay by a class of local elementary school children.

Owen and Ripley Counties also feature models of their courthouses and the surrounding town square inside their respective courthouses. The Jasper County Courthouse displays an extraordinarily large quilt that was made for the centennial celebration of their courthouse.

Besides actual objects that were inside the courthouse, there are other ways to gauge a community's pride in its seat of justice. One of the most telling ways showed up when I began my research. There were some counties where I could only find an a page or two about the courthouse in a book regarding their county history. And then there were the counties where I could find entire books about their particular courthouse. The vertical files in the county libraries were an invaluable source. Some files were literally overflowing with photocopies of newspaper articles about courthouses. The efforts of librarians to save these little bits of history about their county courthouse shows a sort of pride for the building. The contents of these vertical files and books are also notable. The North Vernon Plain Dealer & Sun published, on May 31, 1987, a special edition of the newspaper celebrating solely the rededication of the Jennings County Courthouse. It contains a history of the courthouse, architect, details of renovations that had occurred, an account of a man being hanged on the courthouse lawn, anecdotes, and an account of the county seat battles between Vernon and North Vernon. Another interesting tidbit I ran across in the Jennings County Public Library was a book of autobiographical sketches by local writer Carol Layman. When writing about the courthouse, she says, "And yet, the courthouse, like a castle, was too beautiful for just anybody to enter."³ She then goes on to mention that the only time she would ever go into the courthouse when she

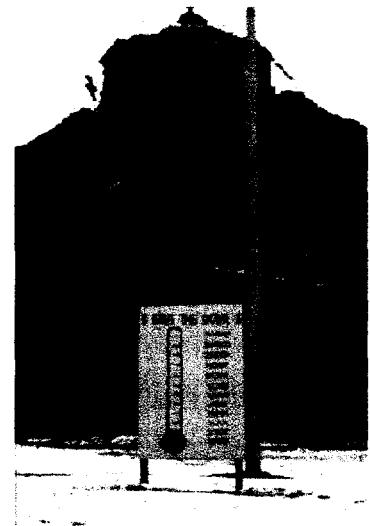
³ Carol S. Layman, *Growing Up Rich in Vernon, Indiana* (North Vernon, Indiana: Stillwaters Press, 1992), 101.

was a child was to impress a friend who came from the country. Little things like that are also indications of how important a courthouse is to a community.

Decatur County takes courthouse pride to the extreme. While some counties feature pictures of their courthouse on “Welcome to . . .” signs and their webpages, Decatur County features their courthouse wherever possible. This is because their courthouse in Greensburg has a small grove of aspen trees growing on top of the tower. The trees have provided Greensburg with a fame unlike that of any other town. It calls itself the “Tower Tree City.” Songs and poems have been written about the trees. In her poem “God’s Symbol,” Anna E. Young wrote, “Then in later years when older I’d grown / Came knowledge that God had the power / To do many great and miraculous things / Along with . . . placing a tree on your tower.”⁴ The courthouse tower has been featured on checks issued by local banks and advertisements in the Wall Street Journal. The trees on top of the Decatur County Courthouse have become cherished to the residents of the town. In fact, the presence of the trees probably saved the courthouse from demolition in 1992. The Decatur County Courthouse is an example in the extreme of how important the courthouse has become to the community.

Of course, a courthouse does not have to have a grove of trees growing on top of it to be saved from demolition. The Owen County Courthouse features a large, highly noticeable dome. When I visited the courthouse, the dome was being restored. Over a thousand dollars worth of pennies had been raised by local school children to assist in the renovation.

Most communities like their courthouses. Especially in rural counties, it seems that people go out of their way to try to preserve their courthouses. The courthouse marks their town as unique, and this reflects back on the people who live in that town. While the actual building is important, as was shown, what people display in and around their courthouse is just as much of a



Fundraising effort outside the Owen County Courthouse.

⁴ Anna E. Young, “God’s Symbol” in *Historical Information About Greensburg and Decatur County*, J. Martin (Unpublished, 1979), 5.

vital part of a county seat's personality. The next part of this paper deals with this aspect of courthouses.



Statue of William English outside the Scott County Courthouse.

County Displays

There is a lot more to a courthouse than the actual building. There are offices, a courtroom, a custodian's workplace, but there are other features that are important as well. For example, are the walls of the courthouse bare, or do they display items important to the county? What is on the courthouse lawn? The answers to these questions can tell a lot about the people who use and live near the courthouse.

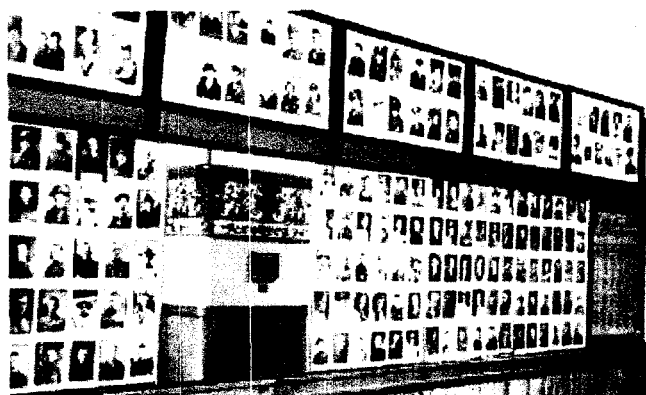
The most prevalent forms of tribute seen in courthouses and on courthouse lawns are war memorials. They range from tablets on the courthouse walls to huge stone monuments. War memorials are placed at the courthouse for a very good reason: the courthouse is the hub of a county, where most county residents have to go at least a few times in their life. What better place to situate a war memorial than someplace associated with freedom and democracy? Every courthouse I have visited has some form of war memorial. Some are big, some are little. A few of the memorials looked as though they were bought from the same company. Regardless of the size, shape, or originality of the memorial, the same good intentions are behind them all.

I began to see a trend in courthouse war memorials. Building huge stone monuments became popular when constructing a Civil War Memorial. A good example stands in front of the Carroll County Courthouse in Delphi. This monument is a large stone obelisk on a wide base, with a statue of a soldier holding an American flag at the top, four rifles with bayonets mounted on the base, and the names of major battles on the sides. World War I memorials often include a statue of a doughboy charging into battle. Actual weapons that were used in World War II often grace courthouse lawns. The Clay County Courthouse even has an entire fighter plane sitting on its lawn. Korea, being the forgotten war, is normally just assigned a place to the county's Roll of Honor, which lists veterans from that particular county who fought in war. Vietnam memorials on courthouse lawns tend to be the polar opposite of the World War I and Civil War monuments. For example, the memorial on the lawn of the Ohio County Courthouse is simply a large stone block with a small tablet that reads, "To the brave men who served in



Civil War memorial outside the Carroll County Courthouse.

Vietnam . . . To the MIA's still unaccounted for . . . To those who served in any war." Most war memorials are emblazoned with slogans such as, "Lest we forget," "We have not forgotten," and "The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten." The disturbing thing is that on some war memorials, a large amount of space has been intentionally left empty to fill with the names of veterans from future wars.



World War One Roll of Honor in the Pulaski County Courthouse.

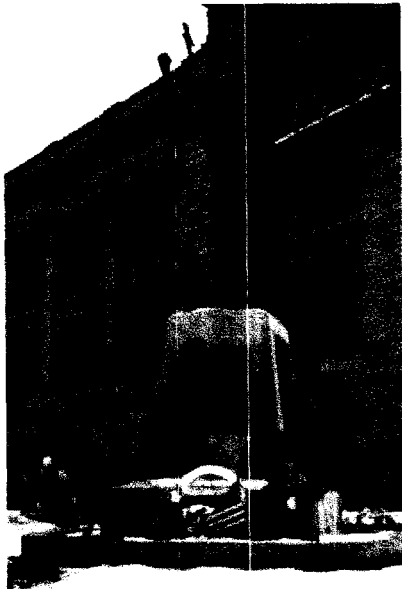
I preferred the smaller, more personal war memorials to the standard courthouse lawn ornamentation. When I visited the Jasper County Courthouse, the only war memorial on its lawn was a small stone marker that read, "In honor of all who served our country in the armed forces from Jasper County." I thought that only having the one small memorial was odd, until I entered the

courthouse and found the halls jammed with memorabilia from wars. Martin County, perhaps not having the funds for a traditional looking memorial, has outside its courthouse a large wooden sign that was painted in honor of those who served in the Gulf War. Owen County, too, had its share of more personalized war memorials. Inside the courthouse is a plaque that reads, "In memory of Leland M. Hichet Seaman U.S. Navy. He lost his life when the U.S.S. Jacob Jones was torpedoed by a German submarine off the coast of England December 6th, 1917." I realize that all veterans cannot be as personally remembered in public as Leland Hichet, but that plaque was more moving to me than any of the war memorials I had seen on courthouse lawns. Another equally impressive display is in the Pulaski County Courthouse. Pictures of men who served in World War One line the hallways of the first floor of that courthouse. By personalizing the loss that occurred in the war, the display elicits a stronger emotional response than just a list of names on a plaque.

Another form of war memorial that is often displayed in courthouses is the American flag. Owen County, too, has one of these in its courthouse. When I visited this courthouse, there was construction work being done inside. My fiancé and I were wandering around, taking pictures, when one of the construction workers pointed out the flag to us. He advised us to read

the story that was posted next to the flag, so we did. It turned out the flag was sewn by women in Owen County for their husbands and sons, who were headed off to fight in the Civil War. When the company from Owen County reached combat, the flagbearer was killed almost immediately. The flag survived the war and made its way back to the courthouse, where it could serve as a memorial to those men from the county who had served in the Civil War.

The flag displayed in the halls of the Benton County Courthouse was flown in a different war. The letter that accompanies the flag reads: "This flag of the United States was flown over the supercarrier USS Theodore Roosevelt from 7:00 am until 4:00 pm on January 14, 1991 as the ship transitted the Suez Canal on her way to the Persian Gulf."



Doughboy statue outside the Owen County Courthouse.

One of the most haunting war memorials occurs in Rush County. Every year on Memorial Day, hundreds of little white wooden crosses are placed on the courthouse lawn. This is an event that can grab the attention of a community, a scene that sticks in their mind. That is what war memorials are supposed to do, remind people of the ones who gave a part or even their entire life for their country. And do not be misled--although some people see these memorials every day of their life, they do not lose their power. Often there are fresh flowers or wreaths lying besides them.

A different sort of war memorial is seen in several counties of southeastern Indiana. These are historical markers on the courthouse lawn that give the route of Morgan's Raid. Honestly, before reading these markers I had never even heard of General John Hunt Morgan or his raid into enemy Union territory during the Civil War. It was interesting to travel from courthouse to courthouse and see how far Morgan had reached into Indiana. While Morgan never really seemed to accomplish much besides riding into county seats and threaten the townsfolk, I was amazed that I could have gone my entire life without knowing the Civil War had physically stretched into Indiana if I had not read those markers.

The Switzerland County Courthouse in Vevay also has a Civil War memorial. This one, however, commemorates the site of a stop on the Underground Railroad. Although it is only a

small, modest plaque on the side of the courthouse, it certainly leads to thought and pride for the county residents.

While not exactly a war memorial, one final memorial deserves mention. This is a small tree growing on the lawn of the Rush County Courthouse. This tree was planted in memory of the people killed during the Oklahoma City bombing.

Other things that many courthouses have on display are items celebrating the town's or the county's history. Like the war memorials, these items come in many different forms. The most standard are the historical markers. These little signs pack a lot of information. A typical sign is the one outside the Carroll County Courthouse. It reads:

"Named and platted in 1828 by Gen. Samuel Milroy, on 100 acres donated by Wm. Wilson for the seat of Carroll Co., named for Charles Carroll, last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence. Henry Robinson was the first settler. Transportation provided by Wabash & Erie Canal in 1840, Wabash RR in 1856, Monon in 1882. City first chartered in 1866. Products now include furniture, lime, plumbing fixtures and truck bodies."

After reading that, a visitor certainly knows a lot more about Carroll County than they had ever known before! Besides giving information about the town or county, historical markers also can give the history of a courthouse, designate it as a nationally registered historic site, or tell about a historic event that happened (as in the Morgan's Raid markers).

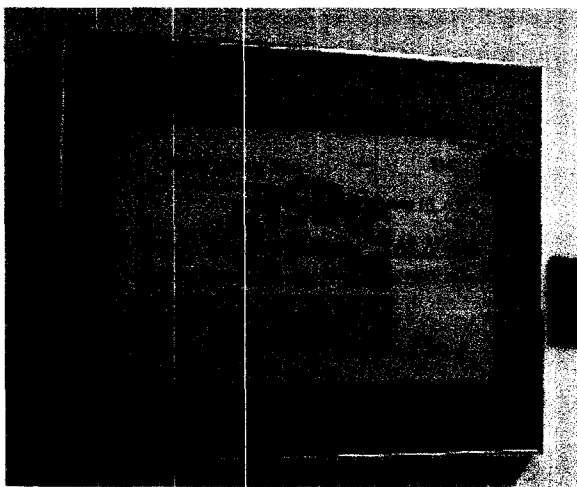
Also prevalent on courthouse lawns are statues or markers dedicated to important people in the county's history. Outside the Scott County Courthouse is a large statue of a rather jaunty-looking William English. English was an important politician in southern Indiana during the 1800s. Dr. William B. Laughlin and Wendell L. Wilkie are honored on markers near the cornerstone of the Rush County Courthouse. Both lived in Rush County: Laughlin helped create Rush County and donated the land that was used for its county seat, and Wilkie was an author and a presidential candidate.¹ A large rock outside the Decatur County Courthouse in Greensburg gives this information about the town's history:

¹ Janet A. Voiles, *Rush County Courthouse: A Century of Facts, Fables and Photos* (Rushville, Indiana: Rush County Historical Society, 1996), 20.

“Colonel Thomas Hendricks, veteran of the War of 1812, founded this town in 1821. He built the first cabin and donated one hundred acres of ground to the new town. On June 14, 1822, Elizabeth Trimble Hendricks, wife of Colonel Thomas Hendricks, named Greensburg for her native town in Pennsylvania.”

Inside the courthouse, something that is commonly seen is paintings or murals of the county's past. The Blackford County Courthouse has murals of idyllic rural scenes along the walls of its first floor hallway; one shows a country lane besides a meandering brook with a watermill on it. The Jennings County Courthouse in Vernon has paintings in its courtroom of the county seat during the 1800s. These paintings show the nostalgia county residents feel for the frontier age. The scenes represent their counties in what some people think of as simpler, better times.

More unique forms of tribute to the town or county are also found. Inside the Owen



County Courthouse is a quilt that features panels decorated with a map of Owen County and typical scenes around the county, including the courthouse, a farmer on his tractor, and covered bridges. Owen County also displays a flag that is emblazoned with the county seal, county map, and the words “Sweet Owen.” The Ripley County Courthouse, on the other hand, shows a bit more materialistic bent by displaying a large framed

Check from Rising Sun to Ripley County.

check from the city of Rising Sun in neighboring Ohio County. The check is for the amount of \$62,274.96 and was written in accordance with a revenue sharing agreement between the two counties regarding the recent riverboat casino boom along the Ohio River.

The lawn of the Union County Courthouse became the home for a log cabⁱⁿ that was acquired, relocated, and preserved by the Union County Historical Society. The Templeton Cabin, built in 1804, is believed to be the first house built in Union County. Previously located in the county jail yard, the cabin was moved to the courthouse lawn in 1980 in an effort to

preserve and display this piece of county history. In a newspaper article describing the move, a member of the Templeton family said his family was planning on having their family reunion on the courthouse lawn in celebration of the log cabin move.²

Something commonly seen on courthouse lawns or on the exterior walls of a courthouse are surveyors marks. The courthouse, often being on the highest land in the corporation or close to the center of a town, is apparently a good place to do some measuring. A chunk of stone on the outside of the Tipton County Courthouse was carved out to read "875.50 Ft. above sea level." Although that is interesting information, it is a bit bewildering why someone chose to measure from exactly that place on the side of the courthouse, as there is nothing visibly remarkable about that height. Outside the Martin County Courthouse is a round geodetic survey benchmark placed in the sidewalk that gives the elevation of that particular piece of land. That seemed more sensible to me than arbitrarily picking a stone in the side of a courthouse and measuring its elevation above sea level. The marker in the lawn of the Jennings County Courthouse combines science and history. It reads: "Sept. 12, 1895 true North - South meridian line established and stones set by Chas. Miles, County Surveyor. 1921 courtyard "fill" buried stones until relocated by county surveyor Bill McCrew July 12, 1981. New markers donated and set by Our Heritage, Inc. 1984."

War memorials, historical markers, and survey markers are all commonly seen at a courthouse. However, other, less typical, items on display at a courthouse can perhaps clue in even better to the personality of a county. Even with the separation of religion and the government, Owen County had a wooden cross on the wall next to its Sweet Owen flag and the Tipton County Courthouse had a Bible available in one of hallways for perusal. In the window of the Health Department of Rush County is a poster that proclaims, "You can't be too careful!" and urges people to "love carefully." One of the basement walls of the Union County Courthouse is lined with numerous food



**Stuffed duck with frog in its throat
at the Tipton County Courthouse.**

² Marcia Cantrell, "Majestic 'Last Ride' for Templeton Cabin to Courthouse Lawn Thursday," 11 August 1980.

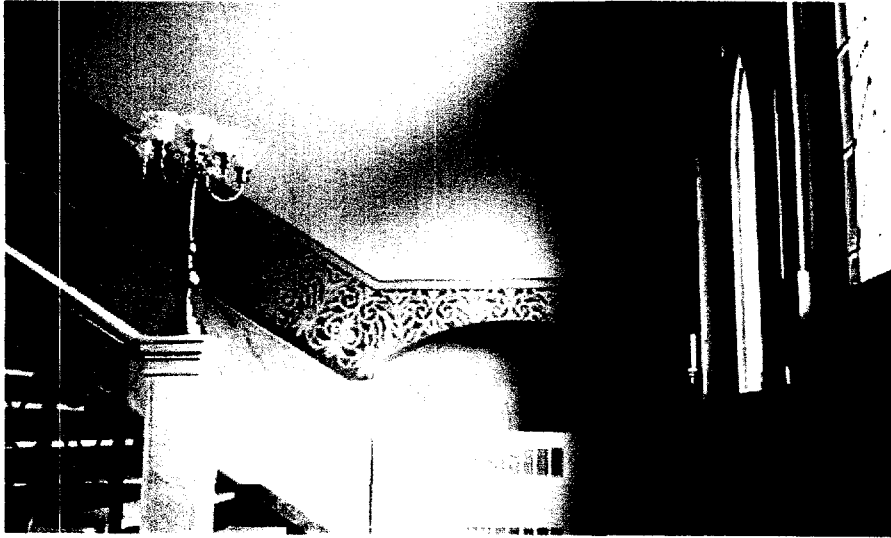
inspection ratings, ranging from 90-100 (Excellent) to 0-59 (Inadequate). Both my fiancé and I thought this was an excellent idea, and spent several minutes finding out which places we did not want to dine at in Union County. The Newton County Courthouse in Kentland, which in all other aspects was a very business oriented place, had a large framed poster of the Alaskan mountain Denali in the moonlight. This was placed on the wall opposite one of the main entrances into the courthouse. The county clerk's office in Tipton was home to numerous stuffed animals, including a duck that quacked when squeezed. When we visited the Clay County Courthouse, elevators were decorated with signs wishing Donna Hoskins a happy birthday. Also in the same courthouse was a little plaque in the rotunda that read, "Thank you



Sign in the elevator of the Clay County Courthouse.

for giving us a step forward on a path which for too long has been untraveled." The plaque had been presented to the courthouse from the moderately mentally handicapped students of nearby Forest Park School.

It is my contention that all of the above items help to tell a little bit about a county and the interests of the people who live there. For example, some counties appear to be more interested in their history than other counties. Some courthouses feature murals that idealize rural county life in the past. There are also the courthouses that display religious symbols within their walls. This would be unacceptable in some parts of the country, but is not even considered odd in these Indiana counties. Every item in the courthouse serves as a key that unlocks a small door to the minds of the people in the community



Stairway of the Jasper County Courthouse.

Conclusion

The Delaware County Courthouse was finely detailed, and a monument of more than local significance. Indeed, it is difficult to experience an equally well-detailed and monumental public building in this part of the state. The views or vistas from the dome revealed the grain of the city and offered the finest panorama of the immediate area.¹

The Delaware County Courthouse was constructed from 1885 to 1887. It was considered to be one of the finest in the state, and an important step in the career of Brentwood S. Tolan, its architect. The building was demolished in December of 1966.

I have heard from older residents of Muncie that the downtown area used to be a thriving place. Now, however, the downtown area of Muncie is desolate. Many residents avoid going there if at all possible. Sure, there are a few bars downtown that attract a little bit of business, a few jewelry stores that are probably patronized by long time customers, but besides these, downtown Muncie is a wasteland. This is partly attributed to the re-routing of state highway 32 away from downtown, but I believe it is also due to the fact that Muncie no longer has a historic county courthouse. There is a large gray block building downtown that stood where Tolan's Delaware County Courthouse once stood, but it is a courthouse in name only. The building stands on a square of concrete, not surrounded by grass and trees. There is little sense of community in the building. No frivolity of any kind. The walls are bare, the workers brusque. In the County Clerk's office two small quilts hang on the walls. They seem hopelessly out of place.

Ironically, the only item in the new Delaware County Courthouse that is a little bit frivolous is a model in the first floor lobby. It is a replica of the old county courthouse in miniature. People passing in and out of the courthouse doors can stop and look at this relic of the past, this hint of the glory that once stood where they were now standing. However, the new courthouse stresses function and speed so much that hardly anyone does notice the model. People are too busy in their hurry to catch an elevator to the second floor.

In most cases a courthouse was designed to be the showpiece of a town. It was a crowning jewel. It was often the center of downtown; the area at which all other events revolved. The

¹ David R. Hermansen, *Indiana Courthouses of the Nineteenth Century* (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University Faculty Lecture Series, 1968), 24.

courthouse had fairs and memorial markers and lights up during the holidays. It gave the community something to be proud of.

And now, in Muncie, the courthouse--the *real* courthouse--was demolished. A pathetic excuse for a county courthouse was constructed in its place. Because of this and other factors, such as the re-routing of state highway 32, the downtown area of Muncie has died. It has lost its reason for pride; it is no longer the center of community activities. There was no longer anything to show off. Muncie began to grow not along Jackson Street, but along McGalliard, which is close to the university and boasts not a county courthouse, but most of the chain restaurants popular in the Midwest all on one street. This is the new source of pride for Muncie, Indiana: fast food. Maybe years from now there will be rows of historical markers on McGalliard, proclaiming that this was the site of Wendy's.

I may be over-exaggerating the case, but I don't believe so. I have seen the future for county seats. There are those that believe in demolishing the old to make way for the new and the more efficient. In doing so, however, they lose sight of what has made them great in the past. Muncie is an example of a city that has lost its roots and is now trying desperately to regain a sense of its history. I am not sure it will recover. And then there are county seats like Rushville, in Rush County, that protect and display their courthouse. They take good care of it. They publish books about their courthouse. They try not to destroy its rich sense of history in the name of progress. And in protecting their courthouse, they maintain a good, healthy downtown area. They make the city a pleasure to pass through. They make towns like Rushville seem like an ideal place to live.

There is probably something to be said for efficiency and utility. I have seen county seats which keep their old courthouses standing and build annexes which try to replicate the sense of the original building. In this study, the courthouses in Greensburg and Fowler have accomplished this. I think this is the ideal route for a county seat to take, if it is at all possible. I realize that the cost of maintaining old buildings rise every year. I realize tearing one building down and starting from scratch seems tempting to county commissioners and other powers that be. However, I think the cost of destroying the symbol of a county seat is much greater than the cost of maintenance on an old courthouse. When the mirror of a community is smashed, that community loses a large part of its soul. This is what has happened in Muncie, and just goes to show that a county that loses this symbol pays very dearly, indeed.

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